

AIMEZ-VOUS CATHERINE EMMERICK?

by Solange Hertz

What Brahms is to music lovers, Sister Emmerick may be to the devout. Even among the staunchest traditionalists this 19th century Westphalian visionary establishes a sort of demarcation as irreducible as it is indefinable. She must stand for something. What is it? Either you like her or you don't.

Heavily quoted in today's eschatological atmosphere, the books ascribed to her are selling as never before, yet not so much the famous DOLOROUS PASSION or THE LIFE OF OUR LORD as the LIFE of the mystic herself. This in itself is significant, for this last contains sensational prophecies concerning the latter days of which the former are quite devoid:

On June 1, 1821 she is reported as saying, "I have had indescribable visions on the state of the Church both in general and in particular. I saw the Church Militant under the symbol of a city like the heavenly Jerusalem, though it was still on earth. In it were streets, palaces and gardens, through which I wandered and saw processions composed entirely of bishops. I recognized the interior state of each. I saw their thoughts issuing from their mouths under the form of pictures. Their religious transgressions were represented by external deformity: for instance, there were some whose head seemed to be only a misty cloud; others had a head, but a heart, a body of dark vapor. . . . Once I saw a mitre floating in the air and a hand out of a dark cloud trying repeatedly, but vainly, to seize it. . . I saw the Holy Father very prayerful and God-fearing, his figure perfect, though worn out by old age and manifold sufferings, his head sunk on his breast as if asleep. He often fainted away and seemed to be dying.

". . . Protestantism was in the ascendancy and religion was falling to utter decay. I saw the majority of the clergy, dazzled by the false show of the young fellow (a school-master), furthering the work of destruction, and one in particular taking part in it through vanity and ignorance. He will see his error only when it will be too late to retrieve it. The misery under him will be great. . . These visions were so frightful that I came near to crying out. I see in the future religion falling so low that it will be practiced only here and there in farmhouses and in families protected by God during the horrors of war."

Well, now, 150 years later in the aftermath of Vatican II, these words make heady reading. In some of the shamelessly doctored texts now being circulated promiscuously, it's even headier, but does that mean we can brush it all aside? Might we be disdainful warnings from heaven? See here, what she said on April 12, 1820:

"I have had another vision on the great tribulation everywhere reigning. It seemed as if something were exacted of the clergy, something that could not be granted. I saw many aged priests, some of them Franciscans, and one in particular, a very old man, weeping bitterly and mingling their tears with those of others younger than themselves. I saw others, tepid souls, willingly acceding to conditions hurtful to religion. The old faithful in their distress submitted to the interdict and closed their churches. Numbers of their parishioners joined them; and so, two parties were formed, a good one and a bad one."

Is this schism? Could Sr. Emmerick be referring here to the Novus Ordo, whose baneful effects are now so apparent everywhere? Especially in view of what she said later in April, 1823:

"I saw many pastors cherishing dangerous ideas against the Church. . . . I saw among other things. . . the Church under N_____. In all the rooms lay his children (that is, his plans), a full collection of his views. . . . He had set fire to the house, and

I with others had to save the goods and convey them to the sheepfold. They built a large, singular, extravagant church which was to embrace all creeds with equal rights: Evangelicals, Catholics and all denominations, a true communion of the unholy with one shepherd and one flock. There was to be a Pope, a salaried Pope, without possessions. All was made ready, many things finished; but, in place of an altar were only abomination and desolation. Such was the new church to be, and it was for it he had set fire to the old one; but God designed otherwise."

Thank God for God. Are we seeing this happen? Who was this Catherine Emmerick, anyway?

The facts of her life are quickly told. A peasant girl of pious parentage born on September 8, 1774 at Flamske in the diocese of Munster, she was favored even in childhood (from Baptism, she says!) with an abundance of extraordinary mystical graces. Desiring to become a nun, she was prevented by poverty until the age of 27 when friends arranged her entry into the Augustinian convent of Agnetenberg in Dülmen.

She had already begun receiving the stigmata in 1798, when the wounds of the Crown of Thorns appeared, and by 1812 she bore visibly the other marks of the Passion on hands, feet and side, advancing all the while in virtue, good works and untold mystical suffering. Needless to say her poor health, frequent ecstasies and alarming supernatural states occasioned her many trials in religious life, despite her efforts to conceal such phenomena. Her woes climaxed in December 1811, when under the government of Jerome Bonaparte her convent was suppressed, the nuns dispersing wherever they could find refuge.

Left behind with a compassionate servant and the convent chaplain, Abbé Jean-Martin Lambert, a French refugee priest from Amiens, she eventually accepted the offer of a small room on the ground floor in the home of a charitable widow. Here she soon became unable to eat at all or rise from bed, living exclusively on pure water and the Blessed Sacrament. She suffered the Passion on Fridays, visited between times with spectacular, detailed tableaux of events and persons from Old and New Testaments, hagiography and Church history. Her spiritual journeys to foreign lands, interventions in current problems, discernment of true and false relics, not to mention her prophecies and knowledge of the secrets of hearts, soon made her an object of great public curiosity, from which she found no way of removing herself.

Understandably subjected to ecclesiastical and civil investigation, the former ordered by her Bishop in 1813, the latter by the French government in 1819, she was exonerated by both authorities of any attempts at deception or dabbling in politics. Far from causing any serious damage to her reputation, these inquiries seem to have contributed to the spread of her spiritual influence. Nor has there been any reason since to set aside their findings.

She died February 9, 1824. When her body was exhumed weeks later by the authorities to allay suspicions that it had been stolen for medical purposes, it was found incorrupt. The cause of her beatification was opened by the Bishop of Munster in 1892, but so far nothing has come of it. Despite certain popular assumptions, she remains neither "Venerable" nor "Blessed," although her popularity grows.

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The amazing visions and prophecies on which her fame rests were all recorded between the years 1819-1824. Not one word of them was written by her. They are exclusively from the pen of the well-known German romantic poet Clemens Brentano and various editors who later compiled them from his notes. And thereby hangs another tale:

In his own way Clemens Brentano is almost as interesting as his famous subject. Of the Heidelberg school of "patriotic revival," with a lively imagination and a flair for folk tales, he won recognition in his own right quite independent of hers. His mother and sister friends of the great Goethe, he grew up in the avant-garde literary circles of his day, falling away completely from the practice of his Catholic faith until the year 1816, during which he underwent a shattering conversion, returning to the Church a year later.

Still in the first flush and upheaval of this personal re-orientation, he heard about Sr. Emmerick from the Protestant convert Count Leopold von Stolberg and became fired with the desire to write her biography. It was for this reason he came to Dülmen, pen in hand. Once arrived there, however, and hearing her visions at first hand, he decided these were far more important than the events of her life -- a conclusion furthermore supported by the Bishop of Ratisbon and his spiritual director Dean Overberg (also Sr. Emmerick's extraordinary confessor), who assured him that being her amanuensis was his mission in the Church.

Nothing could have been more congenial to his florid talents and inclinations. His reputation for irritability and emotional instability lost nothing in the course of his labors, for the trouble and confusion he caused the good Sister and her entourage are only too evident in his own reporting of her circumstances. Setting to work with will and furious intensity, he would brook no interference, indeed begrudging the visionary every friend or visitor who dared interrupt the flow of communications. He was quite understandably begged to leave on occasion by her exasperated directors and others lacking Sr. Emmerick's patience.

On this man's word, nevertheless, rests almost exclusively the reliability of Anne Catherine's visions and prophecies. So true is this, that in 1927 the Sacred Congregation of Rites had no choice but to pronounce Clemens Brentano's notes and editorial work his own rather than hers, placing responsibility for their contents squarely on him. This isn't to say, of course, that he fabricated them, or had any intention of deceiving. It means that, given the peculiar circumstances, it is morally impossible to extricate with any certainty her part in the finished work from his.

There is no reason to doubt Brentano's sincerity. Quite the contrary. He himself was at pains to warn his readers not to take his words too literally, prefacing thus the very first edition of the DOLOROUS PASSION:

"Though the accounts of these visions, among many similar fruits of the contemplative love of Jesus, may appear in some degree remarkable, they solemnly reject the slightest claim to bear the character of historical truth. All that they wish to do is to associate themselves with the countless representations of the Passion by artists and pious writers, and to be regarded merely as a pious nun's Lenten meditations imperfectly comprehended and narrated and also very clumsily set down. She herself never attached to her visions anything more than a human and defective value, and therefore yielded to an inner admonition to communicate them only in obedience to the repeated commands of her spiritual directors after a hard struggle with herself."

Nor did the poet ever state that the contents of this book were wholly from her lips. Years later, Christian Brentano makes it clear in his notes to his brother's Journals that Clemens freely admitted drawing from the writings of Fr. Martin de Cochem and other popular preachers to fill in gaps not covered by the ecstatic's visions. This has been since proved beyond doubt by solid research. In 1913 Schüddekopf, editor of Brentano's Complete Works, didn't hesitate to present the first two volumes comprising the visions as personal productions of the poet.

Not to be overlooked is the fact that the DOLOROUS PASSION is the only volume of dictations ascribed to Sr. Catherine which actually appeared during his lifetime. For

eighteen years after her death until his own in 1842 -- when she was no longer around to consult -- he struggled with the five enormous folio volumes of notes he had taken, trying to put them into some semblance of order, whether chronological or liturgical. In the notes themselves his writing is described by Sr. Emmerick in ecstasy under the figure of a garden, "very luxuriant, but it is pathless, all overgrown." In fact "so overgrown that only he could pick his way through it; others complained of not being able to enter it."

We know it took him nine years after her death to get the DOLOROUS PASSION together. He himself tells us that she dictated her revelations in fragments, often enough incoherently, sometimes cut short suddenly or unintelligible in their terms. These were at times so disordered as to yield little sense, so that his own critical judgment was often called into play in rendering the text.

Henever did make his way through all his notes. When he died he was still completing the second volume, a LIFE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, actually a collation of various visions dealing with our Lady. It appeared posthumously a full ten years later, in 1852, the work initially continued by his wife and then by a friend of hers after her own death.

Christian Brentano, who inherited the manuscripts, handed them over to Abbot Haneberg, later Bishop of Spiers, who in turn relinquished them to the Redemptorist Fr. Karl Erhard Schmöger. It is to this last we are indebted for the visions arranged under the title LIFE OF OUR LORD, which appeared in three volumes over the course of 1858-1880. He is also the compiler of the two-volume conglomerate of visions, prophecies and anecdotes which came out in 1870 as the LIFE OF ANNE CATHERINE EMMERICK. For this work Fr. Schmöger tells us that over and above the mass of material left by Brentano, he consulted notes left by Dr. Wesener, a member of the ecclesiastical commission appointed to investigate the mystic, and some few persons still living who had known her.

It's this last publication which is causing so much interest today, from which the aforementioned startling quotations were drawn. How far can we trust such writings? Can we rely blindly on the discretion of subsequent editors wrestling with a disjointed collection of dictation which even the original writer could organize only partially, and that with the greatest difficulty? Who even at Sr. Emmerick's bedside was unable to grasp the plain literal sense of some passages, let alone their interpretation?

We're not dealing here with an ordinary literary problem, but one which vitally concerns the faith in a time of unprecedented crisis. Even assuming they are correctly transcribed how much credence can be given to Anne Catherine Emmerick's revelations? How far can they be allowed to color our thinking, when she herself "never attached . . . anything more than a human and defective value" to them? Are they truly supernatural in origin, or wholly or partly diabolic, if not entirely natural? How far can we allow such to influence our consciences and modify our decisions? These questions are becoming imperative, now that her works are being read for more than mere aids to pious meditation.

Any dispassionate reader can see for himself that the visions are very uneven in quality, ranging from the sublime to the unbelievably trivial. In the description of our Lady's wedding dress, for instance, it helps no end to bear in mind that Sr. Emmerick once supported herself in the world as a professional seamstress: Progressing from the pearl-encrusted embroidered collar, similar to a pattern "of which I cut out not long ago," she tells us, "Over this she wore an ample robe, open in front. It fell to her feet and was full as a mantle and had wide sleeves. This robe had a blue ground with an embroidered or woven pattern of red, white and yellow roses interspersed with green leaves, like rich and ancient chasubles. The lower hem ended in fringes and tassels, while the upper edge joined the white neck covering," and so on for several paragraphs more of haute couture.

Inching downwards we learn, "The shoes had soles two fingers thick heightened at toe and heel. These soles were made entirely of green material, so that the foot seemed to rest on grass. Two white-and-gold straps held them fast over the instep of the bare

foot, and the toes were covered by a little flap which was attached to the sole and was always worn by well-dressed women." Readers unable to discern the mystical import of all this can at least admire Sr. Emmerick's and her secretary's scrupulous attention to detail. If such revelations aid one's piety, well and good; they seem no serious threat to dogma.

So with her information that "the Milky Way is formed of watery globules like crystals." And science fiction enthusiasts would be happy to read that, "Many of the heavenly bodies are still uninhabited. They are beautiful regions awaiting a future population, gardens and storehouses of certain fruits." Her description of the vegetation on the moon would be a real surprise to the astronauts who have been there. We won't mention the difficulties her "planetary spirits" could cause theologians. Like a Bosch painting, she seems to have a little something for everybody, to be interpreted ad lib.

Other revelations, like that of St. Henry at Mass, are not so amusing. Here we are told that our Lady "took her stand at the right of the Altar," our Lord arriving "in sacerdotal vestments, bearing the Chalice and veil. Two angels served Him as acolytes, and two others accompanied Him. . . . There was no little bell, but there were cruets. . . . The Mass was shorter than with us, and there was no Gospel of St. John at the end." Can this be taken to mean that women should officiate at the Altar? Is this divine sanction of the Novus Ordo, or at least of the truncated Mass which preceded its imposition? To align conscience with this vision, one would have to be morally certain of its supernatural origin, let alone the integrity of its transmission, and even so, who is to vouch for its proper interpretation?

Some of Sr. Emmerick's visions as they have come down to us are in open contradiction to those of magisterially approved mystics who received revelations on the same subjects, notable among them Venerable Mary of Agreda, to whom our Lady herself dictated her biography. According to Sr. Emmerick our Lady died in Ephesus. The great Agreda wrote in her own hand -- in a text declared by papal pronouncement to be authentic -- that our Lady died in Jerusalem. Both can't be right. Although tradition and Agreda both concur that she did live for some time in Ephesus with St. John while the first persecution against the Church raged in Jerusalem, it has been known from earliest times that she returned to the holy city before her death. This is confirmed by some of the greatest Fathers of the Church, notably St. Germanus and St. John Damascene, authorities hardly to be set aside in favor of some uncertain private revelations.

That Sr. Emmerick's rendition is open to suspicion should be immediately obvious from an outrageous statement occurring therein: Speaking of the time before our Lady's death, she says, "For several days she was so weak and ill and so often suffered from fainting attacks that her companions again and again thought her end was near." This is no trivial comment on current fashions of dress or liturgy. This is flying directly counter to the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, a privilege unique with our Lady which completely precluded any possibility of natural illness, which is an effect of original sin.

It's interesting to note that Melanie Calvat, the untutored seer of La Salette, found this quite as shocking as would a well trained orthodox theologian -- and perhaps Anne Catherine herself, if the truth be known! Abbé Gilbert Combes, who queried Melanie on this point in 1901, says she assured him categorically, in writing, that "Mary died without any illness whatever; lively, ardent love alone loosed her soul." And in Jerusalem.

"Stop right there, Catherine!" Melanie put it, "You have bereft the Mother of God of one of her singular privileges by saying she was ever ill. Sickness was laid on us as a punishment for Adam's disobedience. According to you Mary Immaculate, purer than the angels, was struck likewise. Oh! Oh! I can't write any more. . . ." And indeed her writing breaks off there, so horrified was she at the very thought. She had already taken the German mystic to task on several other matters, all the while begging "cette

sainte Emmerick" to excuse her and pardon "such a worm for even daring to outright refuse not only divine, but even purely human credence to her deposition!" But she stood her ground, and we would do well to follow her example.

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To discredit some of Sr. Emmerick's revelations is not to imply that they were all spurious, or all the product of Clemens Brentano's over-zealous editorship. That many of them were possibly -- if not to say probably -- genuinely supernatural is precisely what creates the difficulty. All spiritual masters teach that where God grants true visions He is ordinarily bound in justice to permit the devil to tempt the recipient to false ones. The holier the visionary, the more latitude is hell given.

The rules laid down by the mystical Doctor St. John of the Cross are for the protection of all concerned in such cases: The favored soul must be subject to especially competent direction, exercised under proper authority. He warns that the devil normally clothes his shams with many truthful particulars and much sound theology in order to gain the confidence of his dupes. Even when visions are genuine, it's still possible, even probable, to misinterpret them and go astray in this regard. Whether true or false, all visions should be renounced and forgotten as soon as possible, for not only are their effects not dependent on human activity, but these can actually be impeded thereby.

Above all, he warns, neither director nor directed must desire them or make any efforts to elicit them, for even though God may sometimes grant them in answer to prayer, He can be very angered by such solicitations and may punish the offenders by leaving them prey to error. Under the new law of grace, now that God has revealed everything to us once and for all in His Son, it is not licit to request or even desire special revelations. If He grants them, it must be on His initiative, not ours.

Alas, Catherine had few, if any, of the safeguards prescribed. Thrown out of her cloister by political upheavals, her mystical life was laid open to more than usual hazards. Not only was invitation given to the devil, but she herself had no protection against the tricks normally played by the human subconscious, which loves to manufacture fresh "revelations" from those once validly received. Evaluating her situation -- certainly not of her own making -- Fr. Ludovic de Besse has this to say:

"Had Catherine Emmerick's directors been acquainted with this teaching and practiced it, they would have taken great care not to give her a secretary, obliging her to dictate all revelations to this man, because God never repeatedly ordered her to write them down as He had done in the case of Mary of Agreda. They should have directed her, first, to reap all possible personal advantage, increasing her fervor, and then to forget them, and not speak to anyone about the visions. Otherwise, any time the love of revelations is encouraged in ecstasies, they are most pitifully exposed to falling into grave error. Catherine Emmerick not having followed this rule of prudence, not so much through her own fault as the fault of her directors, it is impossible for her divine revelations not to have been mixed with a quantity of revelations not of divine origin. Furthermore, her revelations come to us through the reports of her passionate admirers" (VIDA DE LA VIRGEN SANTISSIMA, Barcelona 1917, pp. 16-27).

Certain it is they were never submitted to the painstaking scrutiny of the Inquisition as were those of St. Teresa, Venerable Agreda and others who wrote in person under divine command. It's furthermore of record that under Brentano's influence Catherine's visions became ever more numerous and more elaborate. And that's a very, very bad sign, especially as Catherine herself took them all quite seriously. We have Brentano's word for it that far from following St. John of the Cross' advice, "her confessor instead of opposing obstacles to them, seems now to encourage them." Nor are we reassured to read in Fr. Schmöger's LIFE that in Brentano "Sr. Emmerick now beheld before her the one so

long desired, the promised amanuensis who was to note down the communications she had been commanded to make." By whom, exactly? St. John wouldn't have liked this.

We read Catherine Emmerick at our own risk. Never has the Church vouched for the authenticity of any of her mystical productions as she has for those of "approved" mystics. Abbé Cazalès, who knew and admired Brentano, was nevertheless constrained to preface the French edition with a warning that in her case, "approbation has seldom amounted to more than a declaration that these books contained nothing contrary to faith (!), and that they were likely to promote a spirit of piety among the faithful." Were he writing in today's aberrant atmosphere, perhaps he would qualify even these words. Even so, he thought it wise to suppress certain passages from the fifth French edition, and there were eventually suppressions in the German as well.

Great ecclesiastics like Dom Guéranger promoted this reading, but it's significant that he was concerned with the impetus the stories gave to meditation on the Scriptures. That he speaks of their beauty "on the whole" and how they "frequently" show traces of supernatural light, proves his admiration tempered by sound commonsense. Never does he counsel drawing moral or theological principles from her, nor is he intrigued by her prophecies. In much the same vein, St. Mary Madeline Sophie Barat wrote to Brentano to thank him for putting such aids to meditation before the public. Despite some inexactitudes, and judged by ordinary traditional standards the visions stand up rather well. They have never been criticised on the grounds of their beauty or their piety.

Those maintaining their divine authenticity -- persons like Brentano himself, Fr. Schmöger or Fr. Thomas Wegener (of her own Order and Postulator of her Cause) -- based their argument largely on her uncanny descriptions of the topography and climate of the Holy Land, which she had never visited. This in itself is hardly conclusive evidence, however, for any tyro in mystical theology knows that such information can be transmitted subconsciously not only by intelligent evil agency, but even by purely natural means. Also, Sr. Emmerick, like many peasants in the area of Westphalia, apparently gave evidence of natural clairvoyance at a very early age. Latest experiments in ESP would only bear out what Melchior Diepenbrock, future Cardinal of Breslau, wrote to Christian Brentano in the very year of her death:

"Inasmuch as she enters into communication and spiritual relations with other persons through the intermediary of those around her (her confessor Fr. Limberg, Brentano, etc.) and with objects connected with them, she can in like manner come to know the contents of books these people are working with. She could therefore draw the matter and embellishments for her pictorial representations just as well from a library as from the thoughts and imaginings of those around her, without even being aware of the sources. I noticed frequent borrowings of this kind in the first familiarity with Clemens. Even in an inquest in depth, it would always be difficult to distinguish what she received from what she borrowed, the objective from the subjective, the real from the false. Furthermore it would always be dangerous to base on them anything but edification for simple, sensible people."

The canny English Jesuit Fr. Herbert Thurston, whose life work was investigation of such matters, dealt with Catherine Emmerick in his book SURPRISING MYSTICS (1955) and others. He didn't hesitate to place her visions on the same level as communications made to mediums, or automatic writing. He ruled that unless otherwise certified, of themselves they could have no special certainty.

Christian Brentano was of the opinion that his brother, in setting down anything and everything, was "too uncritical," even "too fanatic." He was certainly too biassed in her favor to write objectively. All the more reason, therefore, to stress the fact that he titled the one and only volume actually published by him as "The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to the Meditations of Anne Catherine Emmerick." Only editors like Fr. Schmöger who published later from Brentano's leftover notes put out volumes "according to the visions of," even going so far as to piously but gratuitously refer to her as "Blessed."

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But come now, how to account for the uncanny prophecies of what the Church is undergoing today under our very eyes? They've all come true!

St. John of the Cross can answer that one: "Over and above the difficulty there is in being sure that one is not going astray in respect of locutions and visions which are of God, there are ordinarily many of these which are of the devil. . . For, since he says many things

that are true and in conformity with reason, and things that come to pass as he describes them, it is very easy to be deceived, and to think that, since these things come to pass as he says, and the future is correctly foretold, this can be the work of none save God; for such souls know not that it is a very easy thing for one that has clear natural light to be acquainted, as to their causes, with things, or with many of them, which have been or shall be. And since the devil has a very clear light of this kind, he can very easily deduce effect from cause -- although it may not always turn out as he says, because all causes depend upon the will of God."

After showing how the devil predicts natural events from his knowledge of natural laws, St. John of the Cross goes on to say, "Likewise supernatural events and happenings may be known, in their causes, in matters concerning Divine Providence, which deals most justly and surely as is required by their good or evil causes as regards the sons of men. For one may know by natural means that such or such a person, or such and such a city, or some other place, is in such or such a necessity, or has reached such or such a point, so that God, according to His providence and justice, must deal with such a person or thing in the way required by its cause, and in the way that is fitting for it, whether by means of punishment or of reward, as the cause merits. . . . The devil may have knowledge of this, not only naturally, but also by the experience which he has of having seen God do similar things, and he can foretell it, and do so correctly. (ASCENT OF MT. CARMEL, Bk. II, Ch. 21)

When all is said and done, we can hardly do better than to rest on the conclusions arrived at by Fr. Winfried Humpfner concerning Anne Catherine. In his authoritative work, THE RELIABILITY OF BRENTANO'S EMMERICK RECORD published in 1923 - on which the Sacred Congregation largely based its official judgment -- he was forced to admit that it is impossible to say in her case from the evidence at his disposal, whether we are in the presence of natural phenomena, perhaps even natural contemplation, or of supernatural phenomena proper. This doesn't mean, of course, that Anne Catherine wasn't a true stigmatic whose vicarious suffering may have saved many souls and benefited the Church radically. We may in fact be led to believe that her particular mission was intercessory expiation rather than any duty to impart new information. Like Theresa Neumann's and other stigmatics' of this kind, however, her position in the ranks of the Church remains equivocal at best, awaiting magisterial definition.

In herself she is probably a more telling sign of our times than any vision set down by her secretary, provided we read her correctly. She lived and suffered prophetically. The destruction of her convent which cast her at the mercy of the world; the confusion reigning almost uninterruptedly at her bedside; her bouts with the preternatural; the contradictions and persecutions, not to mention the devoted adulation to which she was prey -- all compounded by the lack of competent authority exercised in her behalf for one reason or another; these speak as loudly as anything she ever said of the chaos coming upon us.

Portent and object lesson, she is also a test. How we react to her is in some wise an indication of how we shall react to the other signs and wonders our Lord predicted would arise to try us in the latter days. "A wicked and adulterous generation," its faith crumbling, "seeketh after a sign. . . Can you not know the signs of the times?" (Matt. 16:4-3).

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